

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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March 20, 1971

MEMORANDUM OF BRIEFING

PRESENT: Henry A. Kissinger
Colonel Kennedy
David R. Young (note taker)

SUBJECT: Laos (Lamson 719)
Cambodia (Toan Thang) 01/71

BRIEFER: Lt. Colonel Martin

DATE: March 20, 1971

LAOS

Kissinger: It looks like they will be out of there by Wednesday or do you think they will stay until April 5?

Martin: No, I think they will be out next week. The people the furthest out will be brought back today. There is another unit just north of 9 and just east of 92 which we tried to extract two times yesterday but couldn't because of heavy fire. The enemy is hanging on to them and they know we are trying to get them out. It seems that the enemy orders are to prevent us getting them out.

Kissinger to Kennedy: Will you have a Q&A prepared for the President on the question "What do you mean the South Vietnamese can hack it?"

Kennedy: It is already done.

Kissinger to Martin: When did you find out that they were going to move out this quickly? As late as Wednesday we had units in the area here just southeast of Tchepone. How long do you think it is going to be before they get out?

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Martin: I don't know sir.

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Kissinger: What's your own personal opinion? What is your judgment?

Martin: I think they'll probably be out by Tuesday. All except for around Co Roc which overlooks Khe Sanh and from which they shelled us when we were there before. I think it is necessary for them to stay there. Has Haig given you any report on this?

Kissinger: Well, Thieu has told them to stay there but we don't know what they'll do.

Martin: The units that are out there now are quite concentrated and if the enemy realizes this they may well hit them hard, but the ARVN may decide to hold.

Kissinger: It is impossible. They'll move out. I notice the Marines are also moving back.

Martin: Yes, they've pulled back. Ostensibly the reason was that they went back to help out a unit that was taking fire and anticipated a ground assault. But I think they are really pulling back to block the road from the south while the others move out along Route 9.

Kissinger: This seems to be the first time that they've used Route 9.

Martin: No, not exactly. They've used it for resupply and to bring in some of the other units. One good thing planned for today is about twelve B-52 strikes which will ring the furthest units west.

CAMBODIA

Kissinger: How are they doing today down here? (Base Area 354)

Martin: They said they are searching for the enemy but there is nothing there. The most that they will ever find there is about eight enemy.

Kissinger: How many do we have searching?

Martin: One task force and four battalions. The real name of the game is for them to move up to the northeast into this more lucrative area where there are a lot of supplies and troops. Instead they are horsing around down here. It's a smelly situation. I think that they put them in just to add to the

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number so that they could say they had a large number of troops in Cambodia. They are not accomplishing a thing militarily. Another interesting point, the enemy has never hit Route 1 and yet there are seven FANK battalions on Route 1.

Kissinger: The tragedy is we could wipe the whole place clean if we had aggressive leadership.

Martin: That's right. We just have to grab on and hold on.

Kissinger: How are things going in the Chup area?

Martin: They say they are progressively pursuing the enemy, yet they pulled back yesterday to rest a bit after they had made that good contact. Their whole battle plan today is to move about 2,000 meters, which they could do in a couple of hours if they wanted to.

Kissinger: But weren't they in further than that the day before?

Martin: Yes sir, that was when they had the good contact but they have now pulled back. The thing is that they will now not only have to go into the Chup but also through it if they want to get to the enemy. The enemy's three main regiments are now scattered to the north and northeast of the Chup area.

Kissinger: How did Tri do it then?

Martin: He closed with the enemy, he carried the battle. He latched on and hung on to them. One thing in our favor is that the area to the north and northeast of the Chup Plantation is now drying out; but they need some aggressiveness and this is what they lack.

Kissinger: They'll take heavy casualties now if they move because the enemy knows what they have to do.

Martin: Yes, that is correct. The enemy does know. However, the rubber plantation is an ideal place to fight and the enemy knows this so they are just keeping away from them. If they wanted to, however, the ARVN could close on the enemy with their armor groups within an hour. What Tri did was give them an objective and deadline to get to it. He kept his people moving.

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Kissinger: How are we doing in the Snoul area?

Martin: They had one light contact which they apparently did not report yesterday when they should have. In any event, they had four friendly killed and three wounded but no assessment of enemy losses. What this usually means is that the ARVN broke off the contact and just got out of there. I continue to have the same news. They have not moved; in fact, they have not moved their main unit since February 8 and they are bound to be attacked soon. On the good side, U.S. air cavalry units killed 5 enemy yesterday in that area.

Kissinger: Wasn't there at one time some thought of their going on to Kratie?

Martin: Yes, but then we got the heavy fighting down in that area and they never moved north. However, the more lucrative area for them to go into would be the area which is to their northeast (Base Area 712). This is where the caches are. One little bit of good news we got yesterday was that they captured a NVA officer who said his unit had received instructions that his units ammunition rations were going to be reduced in half due to the ARVN Lamson operation and Cambodian operations.

Kissinger: But, they will remedy that fairly quickly.

Martin: Yes, that's correct, but it is a good sign.

Kissinger: The tragedy is that we had victory in the palm of our hand and we just let it slip out.

Kissinger to Kennedy: Did Haig say anything about III Corps?

Kennedy: No.

Martin: What was Haig's general assessment of the situation in Lamson?

Kissinger: He said that in effect they were bugging out. In retrospect Martin what do you personally think of the whole operation?

Martin: Well, there was one plan which you know what Westmoreland recommended which was to do it in leaps. We would have first gone straight out 9 to 92, then straight south down to Muong Nong, then north west to Tchepone and then down into the area south/southwest of Tchepone. And I must say this had a lot to be said for it.

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Kissinger: Who was in Tchepone in the end? Were these the same troops that moved back into FB lo lo?

Martin: Yes.

Kissinger: Why did they move back into lo lo?

Martin: I don't know. We really didn't know that this was an objective until they were there. They were supposed to move down into the Binh Tram area. There were several advantages to the leaping plan; it gave us a shorter turn-around time for the helicopters down in the Muong Nong; the weather would probably have been better because it's lower and not hilly; we would have been able to get the casualties out of there more quickly and to resupply them more easily.

Kissinger: Frankly, why did they go to Tchepone?

Martin: They went for a name. They thought it gave them a tangible target to shoot for.

Kissinger: But, there really were not that many enemy there.

Martin: That is correct.

Kissinger: How is the weather now?

Martin: The North is still socked in.

End of Briefing.

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